

BREAST CANCER AND ENVIRONMENTAL RESEARCH ACT

Issues and Rebuttals

The bill is **disease-specific**—a carve out for breast cancer environmental research.

- If the NIH process isn't working for breast cancer research, then we need to reform all of NIH. The House Committee on Energy and Commerce did just this in late September 2006. Barton said it well, "We have to say 'let the NIH be the NIH' and stop attempting to micromanage, even with the best of intentions.
- We aren't using taxpayer dollars well if we let politicians pick winners and losers in disease-specific research. If we do a special program just for breast cancer victims—isn't that a slap in the face to the 5-year old with leukemia?
- Currently, all research proposals compete through a peer-review and Advisory Council (stakeholder input) process based on the merits and potential of each proposal. They compete for dollars out of each Institute's "silo" of NIH funding—NCI's budget is about \$4.8 billion for most cancer research. This bill will take this breast cancer research out of competition with other cancer research. Not only is this unfair to other cancer research, it actually decreases the incentive of breast cancer researchers to develop competitive proposals.
- Not only is this bill disease-specific, it is specific to the link between the environment and that one disease!

The bill requires and micromanages the Secretary to establish **Centers of Excellence** for environmental factors related to breast cancer etiology.

- The NIH **already** has the authority to do this and they have **already** created some of these centers. About the existing Centers NIH said, "the original four Breast Cancer and Environmental Research Centers are currently in their second year and promise to provide valuable information."
- \$30 million/year for 5 years is set aside for these Centers in the bill.
- NIH has criticized this because it "provides only one approach to designing a breast cancer/environmental research program, focused on funding a required consortium of Breast Cancer and Environmental Research Centers of Excellence. Individual project awards and other research mechanisms, such as training programs to enhance research capacity, could provide research benefits to supplement those of the large centers and allow flexibility in reaching the goals of the bill."

The **9-member research panel** is to recommend where research dollars for breast cancer should be spent. While some similar panels have been created for other diseases in the past, this panel is more powerful in how it may direct grant funding and is a sell-out to the breast cancer groups. 3 of the 9 panel members must be from the general public who have been affected by the disease. While similar panels exist for other diseases (which aren't a good idea in the first place), this panel has more authority to direct research dollars.

- The bill's goal is to increase breast cancer victim participation in the decisions of where research dollars are spent (modeled after the DoD \$150 million program).

- NIH has said that other mechanisms, such as convening a series of workshops to solicit input from all stakeholders, would be more inclusive.
- NIH already has structures in place that this would **duplicate and circumvent**. The *peer review* process gives technical evaluation of grant proposals and the *Advisory Councils* (each Institute has one) consider stakeholder perspectives.
- If Congress really doesn't think the current process is effective for one disease, then Congress should consider NIH reform for all disease research.

Federal inadequacy? Although proponents of the Breast Cancer and Environmental Research Act imply fact that there is a lack of focus at the Federal level on breast cancer research, this is not the case.

- DoD has a specific carve out for breast cancer research that receives \$150 million a year (that doesn't have to compete for research dollars with other cancers). The purpose of this bill is to import the DoD model into NIH. The stated mission of the DoD model is to meet existing research gaps in breast cancer research. If the DoD model is so successful, why don't we focus our efforts on bolstering that program rather than creating a new structure at NIH? And direct our NIH reform activities to solving the bigger problems that plague the whole agency?
- The National Cancer Institute (which includes breast cancer research) is one of the most resource-rich institutes at NIH, receiving nearly \$4.8 billion in FY2006. \$650 million of NCI's budget (\$650 million NIH-wide) went to breast cancer research and \$76.7 million went to research on the link between breast cancer and the environment. An additional \$27 million went to this research on the link between breast cancer and the environment at the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS).
- Without this bill, we're **already** spending more than \$100 million to research the link between breast cancer and the environment. And we're spending almost \$1 billion on breast cancer research across the federal government.